

## The CIA in Trouble over *Pueblo*

The *Pueblo* inquiry has sparked off an acrimonious dispute — conducted in appropriate secrecy — between a group of American service chiefs, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the National Security Agency (about which the general public knows even less than it does about the CIA). There is even speculation that because of the *Pueblo* episode the head of the CIA, Mr Richard Helms, is in danger of losing his top-secret job — even though President Nixon had invited him to stay on. His position is 'intrinsically' vulnerable because he was a Democratic Administration appointee.

Under heavy fire from both military and political critics, Mr Helms recently took the rare step of issuing a statement in self-defence. 'Neither the CIA, nor I personally', Mr Helms declared, 'have had anything to do with the mission of the *USS Pueblo*, the ship itself or any of her crew'. This disclaimer, unfortunately, only brought more criticism on his head; for some observers interpreted it as an attempt by Mr Helms to pass the buck to the NSA.

This has scarcely endeared him to members of that agency — especially as it may well have been the NSA, and not the CIA, which initiated the *Pueblo* operation. The complicating factor is that Mr Helms also bears the designation of Director, Central Intelligence, which means that he bears overall responsibility for all intelligence operations, just as the late Mr Allen Dulles did.

Needless to say, Mr Helms is in trouble with the navy. Whatever the navy's chiefs may think of Commander Lloyd Bucher's actions — and opinion in the navy as elsewhere is inevitably divided — his disclosure that 'these people were not working for me' has aroused deep apprehension and bitter resentment throughout the service. ('These people' were the intelligence officer and 38 enlisted men who worked on the *Pueblo* behind a triple-locked door which the commander himself required special permission to pass).

The commander therefore was not in complete command of his own ship. Yet Commander Bucher has been warned that he may be court-martialled for violating Article 0730 of navy regulations, which says: 'The commanding officer shall not permit his command to be searched by any person representing a foreign state nor permit any of the personnel under his command to be removed from the command by such person, so long as he has the power to resist'.

But it is not merely the naval chiefs who are indignant. Their anger is shared by many senior army and air force officers, some of whom are influential with Congress. They want the whole affair fully investigated. The chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, Representative Mendel Rivers, has already been persuaded to conduct an inquiry into it; but the military malcontents are hoping to prevail on Senator Fulbright, the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, to interest himself in the affair. The odds are that he will; in which case a hard time awaits Mr Helms, the CIA and the NSA. Senator Fulbright has often been anti-military; but more often he has been anti-CIA.

The fact is that all three of the services have long-standing grudges against the intelligence agencies, particularly the CIA, and the *Pueblo* affair may merely bring matters to a head.

In spite of all its panoply of power the Defence Department (which has its own intelligence section) has often found itself playing the role of supplier — both of men and weapons — to the CIA, to enable the agency to conduct clandestine operations abroad. The State Department (which also has an intelligence unit) has similarly been under frequent levy by the agency. (Mr Dean Rusk, the former Secretary of State, once remarked ruefully at a Congressional hearing that in some American embassies the personnel consisted mainly of people of 'other agencies'; everyone knew whom he was referring to.)